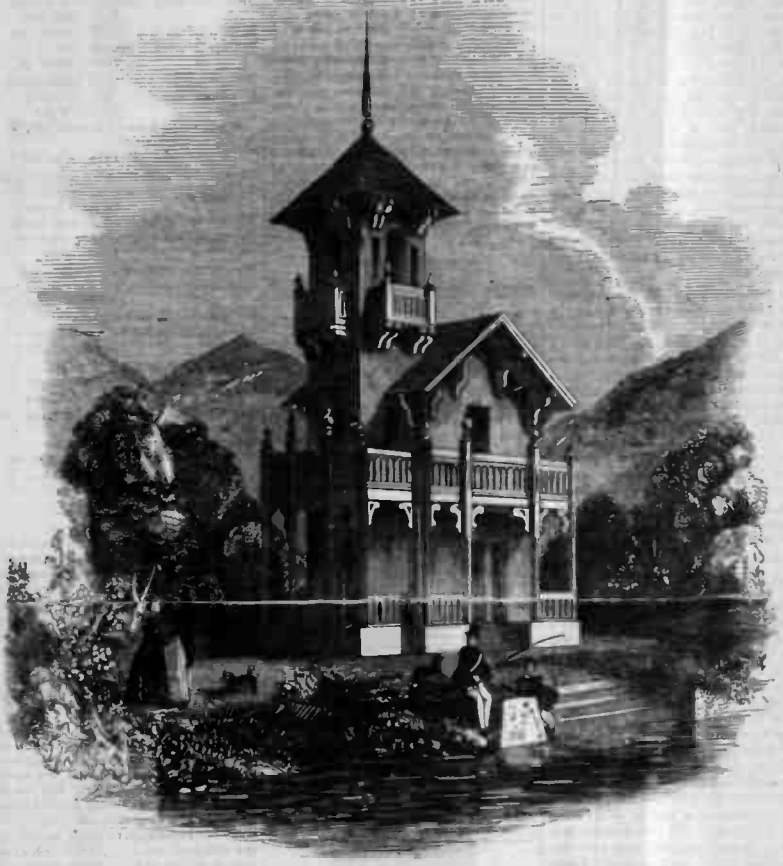

PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF A SUMMER HOUSE.

(From a Design furnished by a Correspondent.)

ON THE FAILURE OF ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITIONS.

No. I.

I was some time since walking, with the assistance of my crutches, down a rather plebeian portion of the Holborn district, when my attention was arrested by an exclamation from a little boy to his sister—"Oh, Jenny, look at that poor blind man." I am too accustomed to expressions of pity and goodwill from the lower orders (as they are termed) to pay much attention to them, but there was something so ludicrous in the heartiness of the lad's sorrow compared with the magnitude of his blunder, that I could not help noticing his sympathetic remarks. I am not blind—at least physically—but lame. His confusion of maladies was as laughable as his expression of pity was honest and sincere.

Such appears to be the error of the architectural profession with respect to competitions. They all see a defect—they recognize an evil, but, like the boy, they have not yet learned to distinguish things rightly. They cry out because of blindness when lameness is to be deplored. The progress of architectural common sense is slow, and they would bestow spectacles when crutches were a far more fitting and more serviceable gift.

We have been told, with great emphasis and [illegible] that the [illegible] of the present age is the partial prevalence of the competitive system, and the unfairness of many of the committees when competition is adopted. With equal solemnity have we been assured that the public enlightenment will by-and-by remedy these defects, and, in short, that when the public best understand architecture, they will be best able to decide on the merits of its professors. In pursuance of this theory many and various projects have been propounded for the instruction of that very varying body. Unoccupied benevolence has almost exhausted itself in devising plans, and the result is that we are complaining more than ever, and seem in greater perplexity now than we were at the commencement of the inquiry.

Nor need this failure excite much surprise. Neither the two frequent absence of competitions, nor the partiality of committees, can very readily be avoided, while those competitions derive discredit from the unfairness with which they are conducted, or these committees deserve reproach for the assuming ignorance of their members. In very few instances have men of taste and education been called upon to decide on the merits of plans submitted by architects to a committee. The history of competitions is fertile in instances of partiality and ignorance—the best proof that the evil exists is the outcry against its prevalence.

It is not difficult to trace this current to its [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]